

The  
Power of  
Presence

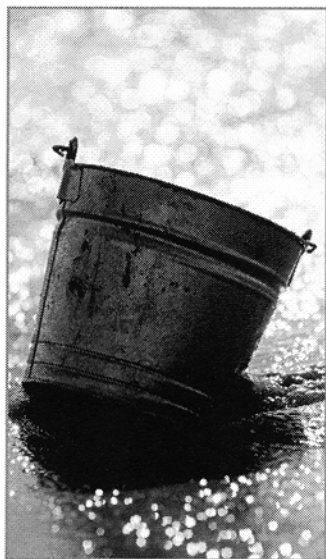
**Helping People Help People**



**Doug Manning**

# The Power of Presence

Helping People Help People



In-Sight Books, Inc.  
Oklahoma City

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# Preface

Almost forty years ago, a book by John Drakeford titled *The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear* skinned my eyes so I could see. From that moment on, I have been trying to write this book. It has taken all of these years to fill out the concepts I first discovered in that book. I began by experiencing the dynamics of small groups. As I began to explore my feelings, and the feelings of some brave people who chose to share with me, I discovered more and more applications to the power of listening.

A few months ago, quite by accident, I stumbled onto the analogy of the buckets. From that moment on, the book wrote itself.

As with all of the books I have written, I must thank my wife for fifty years of constant and loving support. I must also thank the staff of In-Sight Books. Their care and talent make writing a relaxed joy. What I mess up, they fix.

My hope is that someone reading this book will discover the wonderful experience of the power of listening.

*Doug Manning*  
August 27, 2003

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## Can We Talk?

Within days of September 11, 2001, horrors, the phones in our office began to ring. We heard the same request over and over for days on end, "What can we say to these people?" The whole world was overwhelmed and searching for help. It seemed as if everyone felt like it was time for them to talk and no one knew what to say.

Times of great and sudden tragedy make that need much more acute, but we face something very similar almost every day. There is rarely a time when someone we know is not facing pain. A friend is getting a divorce. A family is in great struggle with a child out of control. Someone we know has just lost a loved one. A family is going through the devastation of a suicide. A family member has been diagnosed with cancer or Alzheimer's disease. Maybe the most frightening of all—someone very close is dying.

"What do you say to someone in pain?" is not just a question we ask after some national tragedy. It is a question we face every day of our lives. That is especially true if our work brings us into intimate contact with people. All caregiving professionals face this issue on an hourly basis. What do we say to people?

One of the amazing discoveries of my life has been that just because people work in caregiving environments does not guarantee that they know what to say or how to respond to people in pain.

A funeral director pulled me aside and quietly said, "I have been a funeral director for eighteen years, and I have no idea what to say to families when they walk into my office."

I cannot count the number of nurses, hospital chaplains, clergy, physicians, social workers, hospice workers, and others in these types of occupations who have expressed the same kind of fears and helpless feelings.

One visit with a person in grief will reveal that the vast majority of us have no idea what to say nor how to react to people in grief or pain. Most report that, not only do people say the wrong things but, too often, their friends avoid them because they do not know what to say. Almost everyone who suffers the death of a loved one will also suffer the loss of friends. The friends mean well and certainly do not wish to say the wrong things. They do not want to avoid their friends in their time of need, but they have no idea what to say.

My hope for this book is not that I will provide some magic words for you to say. My hope is that we can have an honest conversation about the needs and the frustrations we feel in trying to meet those needs, and together build a new pattern that will help people heal. You will hear me say over and over that people in grief need safe people. My hope for this book is that we will discover ways to be safe people.

This book is written in a personal voice. I visualize this as just the two of us talking about a mutual concern. There is nothing clinical in this book. I am not that smart. Everything I know about grief comes from what someone has told me or what I have experienced myself. Everything I know about people has been taught to me by people. I am not an expert; I am just a person who has traveled around listening to people's stories. I am here to share with you what these stories have taught me.

